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# Libraries after Charlie: From Neutrality to Action

RAPHAËLLE BATS

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## ABSTRACT

In the weeks following the attacks in January 2015 against *Charlie Hebdo* and Hyper Cacher, French libraries reacted with speed, intensity, and emotion to the events by, among other things, displaying posters, making acquisitions, and holding exhibitions and debates. The events spawned by the attacks were politically charged. While the attacks challenged the sanctity of freedom of speech in France, the ensuing rallies in protest against them questioned both French unity and the notions of mobilization and engagement in an era that we had come to consider depoliticized. Further, the French nationality of the murderers challenged French democracy's capacity to offer ways in which its citizens can really live together. Considering all these factors, one wonders what led libraries, usually ardent defenders of their own neutrality, to take a stance during such a political moment in French history. Analyzing the actions carried out by libraries after what the French now simply call "Charlie" provides an opportunity to question the political role that libraries give themselves. This paper first looks at the actions of libraries in France from January to December 2015. It then examines how libraries and librarians have reconciled their own requirement of neutrality with their desire to take part in events that, while potentially historical, are also highly political. Finally, through this occasionally difficult process of reconciliation, the paper reveals an increasing need in the library profession to rekindle its activist vocation.

## INTRODUCTION

In January 2015 France was shocked by the attacks against *Charlie Hebdo*, a satirical newspaper, and Hyper Cacher, a kosher supermarket. An un-

precedented reaction, mainly to the attacks on freedom of speech, occurred both online and in the streets, as seen in demonstrations like the antiterror rally on January 11. This is shown by the phenomenal use of the #jesuischarlie hashtag on Twitter as early as January 9 (Twitter France, 2015). The January 11 rally attracted 4 million people—the biggest rally ever in France (“Contre le Terrorisme,” 2015). This rally was described as “republican,” meaning that it made visible and possible the union of the French people.

In the wake of the attacks and the following manhunt, information professionals were particularly active. Journalists covered the events extensively, perhaps even excessively, according to the Conseil Supérieur de l’Audiovisuel (CSA),<sup>1</sup> which sent out thirty-six warnings to sixteen media outlets, particularly in regard to the disclosure of sensitive information (“Charlie Hebdo,” 2015).

Likewise, teachers, who are also information professionals, became involved in action to assist school children in understanding the actual events, as well as the images, that they might have seen in the media or on the internet. Teachers at the same time received renewed recognition of their role in education for citizenship, and were directly confronted with the nonunanimity of *Je suis Charlie*. Indeed, many pupils refused to participate in the minute of silence, not considering themselves as “Charlie.” Debates in the classrooms sometimes had unfortunate consequences, such as the denunciation by teachers of young children (ages 8–9) to the police for saying that they were “taking the terrorists’ side” or for shouting “Allahu Akbar” during the minute of silence meant to honor “Charlie,” without even meeting with the families or listening to the children (Battaglia & Collas, 2015).

These excesses by journalists and teachers show how difficult it is for information professionals, broadly defined, to approach these events without emotion, and to avoid letting the urgency of the situation obscure the limits that should not be crossed. But what about French librarians?

In the midst of all this, libraries also had reacted with speed, intensity, and emotion; in the weeks following the attacks, they demonstrated their response to these events. But the events, from the attacks on January 9 and 11 to the rally on January 11, are political in more than one respect: while the attacks challenged the sanctity of freedom of speech in France, the rallies questioned both French unity and the notions of mobilization and engagement in an era that we describe as “depoliticized” (arising from such factors as the crisis of representation and decreasing voter turnout). Finally, the French nationality of the murderers challenged French democracy’s capacity to offer ways in which we can really live together. Considering all these factors, one wonders what led libraries, usually ardent defenders of their own neutrality, to take a stance during such a political moment in French history. Analyzing the actions taken by libraries after what the

French now call “Charlie,” especially those carried out shortly after the attacks in January 2015, offers an opportunity to question the role that libraries give themselves and speculate on their redefinition or redeployment.

In this paper I first look into the actions carried out by libraries in France from the time of the attacks in January 2015 to the end of that year. I then examine how libraries and librarians have reconciled their own requirement of neutrality with their desire to take part in an event that, while political, is also potentially historical.<sup>2</sup> Finally, through this sometimes difficult process of reconciliation, I reveal an increasing need in the library profession to rekindle its activist vocation.<sup>3</sup>

### METHODOLOGY

After reading, translating, and distributing a text by David Lankes on what French libraries should or could do in reaction to “Charlie,” Nathalie Clot, director of Angers’s academic library (Clot, 2015), and the author of this paper (Bats, 2015) decided to launch a survey of the actions that were actually carried out. The desire to collect such information came from a feeling of powerlessness shared by colleagues and fellow citizens throughout France. The collecting of information itself had several objectives. The first was professional in nature: to find examples of actions in order to mutually inspire one another and find a way to express the emotion and stupor that had seized librarians and their fellow citizens. The second objective revolved around librarians’ deeply embedded desire, amplified at such a historically significant moment, to document events and preserve a record of them, including librarians’ own reactions to what had happened. Finally, the survey was prompted by research objectives in library science: to obtain materials that would question the role of libraries in times of crisis and contribute to the construction of a democracy that is constantly evolving.

The survey was launched on January 11, 2015, with the #bibenaction<sup>4</sup> hashtag on Twitter as a gathering point, to allow for the creation of an open and visible list of activities being undertaken by libraries. Many activities were recorded in this way, whether they had been conducted by those posting them under the hashtag or were merely witnessed and reported by others. To this first list were then added written accounts, emails, blog comments, and also oral stories, most of them “off the record.” These stories are not visible on the #bibenaction list, but have been stored in the internal database. Finally, a search through libraries’ websites, as well as their Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest pages (among others), revealed other activities to add to the collection. These were then indexed using the #bibenaction hashtag. The keywords used for these searches were mainly “Libraries and Charlie,” “Libraries and the Charlie Hebdo attacks,” and “Libraries and *je suis Charlie*.” In February 2015 Philippe Charrier and

Dominique Lahary, two eminent French librarians, having not seen our survey, launched another call for stories. Their network, which is different from ours, allowed them to discover new actions that, with their permission, we added to our list. Throughout 2015 we steadily continued to receive more stories.

Records of all activities are kept on Twitter, as well as an electronic spreadsheet that to date contains 153 entries.<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that this collection is not comprehensive, not only because many activities have not been reported on our networks or the web and have thus remained invisible to us, but also because a refusal to act is also an action in itself, even if it cannot be effectively be counted as such. Regarding this second category of action missing from our list, we could not differentiate between a library that *could not* undertake an activity and one that deliberately *choose not* to act (or, more specifically, react).

### GENERAL RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

The survey shows that activities have been undertaken by all types of libraries (national,<sup>6</sup> municipal, and academic) in many different geographical areas: in mainland France, in French overseas departments and territories,<sup>7</sup> and in French establishments abroad (such as the Institut Français). Also, the libraries that undertook them varied in size: from the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) to very small library facilities (often volunteer-supported) in towns with less than a thousand inhabitants.

In addition to this general typology, we outlined three significant periods in the reactions that occurred. The first, on the day following the attacks and over the course of the week following, was a time for messages: messages of condolence, mourning, stupor, and emotion, but also messages in defense of the freedom of speech. The display of a *Je suis Charlie* poster on or in a library or on a library's website was the main action taken during this first period. Posters were displayed in a variety of formats: a simple poster with no accompanying narrative; a poster with a narrative; photographs of staff members posing with posters; and posters with variations on the *Je suis Charlie* slogan, such as *Je suis liberté d'expression* (using the same font and black background) or *Je suis Charlie* in dozens of languages. In addition to libraries displaying these posters, in some places, spaces for free expression were also offered in many municipal and academic establishments.

The second period, which occurred during the month following the events, was characterized by actions that drew directly on librarians' traditional skills and domains: selections (works, songs, digital resources); acquisitions (subscriptions to *Charlie Hebdo* and the purchase of the January 14th issue); exhibitions and presentations (including front pages of *Charlie Hebdo*, caricatures created around the world following the attacks,

works by the victims, and resources on the freedom of speech and also on caricatures); the creation of projects and organizing discussions; and the presentation of films and documentaries.

Finally, the third period, commencing in February 2015 and continuing to the present, comprises more “original” activities. These are less connected with the events themselves and librarians’ traditional professional roles. The activities involve new opportunities for libraries: for example, spectacular acts like the opening of the new Pierres-vives library in Montpellier with almost empty shelves, showing what censorship would eventually lead to; or more long-term activities, such as projects concerning citizenship (in partnership with the municipality) in Nancy, participatory projects concerning democracy in Lyon, and social-cohesion projects in Dunkirk. This phase was also marked by reflective and educational activities like workshops, internal training, and round-table discussions that addressed issues of the freedom of speech and pluralism in libraries, as well as social cohesion and engagement (for example, at the Champs Libres library in Rennes, where staff training was set up during the summer).

We should point out that the displays of these messages and exhibitions occasionally extended beyond three months; one can still find *Je suis Charlie* posters on some websites. Also noted is that some librarians’ initiatives, such as exhibitions, debates, and conferences, took place quite late, in the fall of 2015. This is either because the librarians took the time within their establishments to reflect on the events before formulating a professional, considered response (as was the case at the INSA library in Lyon,<sup>8</sup> which ultimately declared 2015 as the year of freedom of speech and organized a series of events supporting it) instead of presenting an emotional, knee-jerk reaction, or else because some early responses did not go over well and more time was needed to gauge what the public required. Indeed, in some libraries the display cases showing caricatures from *Charlie Hebdo* were vandalized; and when public events were organized to present a unified front against the attack on freedom of speech, at times only the librarians themselves were present. These types of reactions from the public, whose attitudes toward the activities of librarians at this time have not yet been the subject of a specific study, have offered librarians the opportunity to reevaluate themselves and to question their actions.

### DISCUSSION: FROM NEUTRALITY TO ACTION

This question of the legitimacy to act is linked to the familiar question on the neutrality of libraries. The issue of neutrality in French libraries is an ongoing debate concerning both librarians’ professional daily work (for example, such as creating collections) and their involvement in special situations (concerning censorship and/or political pressure). French librarians consider neutrality mostly within the context of their collections and the acquisition of documents that allow for the education of citizens,

their emancipation, and their capacity to participate in public debate. In other words, “libraries do not dictate, [but] they support the debates” (Duquenne, Vanderhaegen, & Éboli, 2015, p. 75).

Moreover, the values put forward by the French Republic, such as *laïcité* (the separation of Church and State) regarding the separation of religious and political symbols, render the requirement of neutrality essential, thus forcing librarians “to adopt a neutral stance, to avoid advocacy for any tendencies, and to refrain from any proselytizing” (Duquenne et al., 2015, p. 74). It should be explained here that *laïcité* has a special meaning in France. It comes from the schism between Church and State in 1905 and is considered essential for a cohesive society. It shows that *fraternity*, the third value of the French Republic (the others being *liberty* and *equality*), does not take place at the level of the family, belief, faith, or opinion, but at the national level. Being French is what should constitute the fraternity among individuals of various opinions and faiths. As such, fraternity is one of the pillars of national education; children, teachers, and school personnel do not have the right to talk about their political or religious opinions. Furthermore, all public services, including libraries, have to respect *laïcité* so as not to impose opinions or beliefs on the public while also preserving public services from any influence that could be polemical and threaten the fraternity that is part of citizenship.

Finally, the civil-servant status of French librarians compels any work done in libraries to be “respectful of the neutrality of public service” (Association des Bibliothécaires de France [ABF], 2003, n.p.). This requirement of neutrality does not solely concern libraries, but also the codes and rules of public service itself in order to guarantee the principle of the continuity of public service.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, whether in times of crisis or not, French librarians have to comply with a triple injunction for neutrality: that of the mission of the library (public debate); that of the values of the French Republic (*laïcité*); and that of the rights and duties of the public servant (continuity). The events of January 2015, however, only added to the complexity of these requirements.

#### *Charlie, Libraries, and Public Debate*

*Pluralism?* One can certainly consider that subscriptions to *Charlie Hebdo*, which after the attacks increased hugely, are a way to put some “debate” back into collections that can sometimes be sterilized by a kind of neutrality rendering them devoid of all meaning. Thus “one could be tempted to ban all works that could be seen as controversial . . . so as not to offend the public, the elected representatives, and finally the colleagues” (Duquenne et al., 2015, p. 74). After all, subscriptions to the magazine, as well as the exhibitions of caricatures after the attacks, could be regarded as a call for debate and exchange. As Kupiec (1999, p. 11) says, “one shall keep in mind the example of these American librarians that put posters on the

doors of their establishment, asking their readers to come and complain if they did not find documents in the library they would be shocked by.” If such actions are indeed able to generate debate, we should wonder why they have not been used earlier. In other words, if libraries did not subscribe to *Charlie Hebdo* prior to the attacks, it was obviously because the magazine was regarded as controversial and might create conflict, in particular with the public. Bertrand (2015) notes that libraries have avoided political matters for a long time, going so far as refusing to acquire activist publications—a decision that directly conflicts with their fight against censorship. Similarly, in a study on Quebec librarians, Allnut (2012, p. 126) notes that “there was indeed a gap between the attitude of the participants regarding intellectual freedom as a concept and intellectual freedom as an activity, when in fact librarians would spontaneously be more guardians of social consensus than ardent defenders of freedom of speech.”

And yet, this paradox seems to have occurred to librarians only some time after the attacks. While their first reaction was to proclaim defense of the principle of freedom of speech, the very fact that they did not have *Charlie Hebdo* in their collections *before* the attacks forced them to analyze their own capacity to accept the principle. Libraries have had to question their own views on the pluralism of their collections.

*Political Pressure?* Moreover, in January 2015 the national and local governments not only adopted the *Je suis Charlie* slogan (thus making it institutional), but occasionally they also made it mandatory to display a *Je suis Charlie* poster in their departments, including their libraries. By the end of 2015 some library websites hosted by their municipalities were still displaying *Je suis Charlie*. Therefore the question of the possible neutrality of an institutionalized discourse arises, as well as the matter of the status of the civil servant, and the respect of the neutrality of public service when it comes to the relation of librarians with their regulatory authorities (that is, elected representatives).

During the second half of the 1990s, French libraries were shaken by cases of censorship and political pressure by library councils. This period was short, although it had a lasting effect on French libraries, raising questions about the defense of neutrality and the librarians themselves. Therefore Kupiec (1999, p.11) argues that “if readers should be protected, then librarians should be too. It seems that despite the difficulties that come from the fact that most of them are public servants, it would be desirable to introduce in the code a conscience clause.” Neither a conscience clause nor a law was adopted, but some librarians at the time thought that the latter was necessary: “By transferring the principle of neutrality of collections from the regulatory domain (decree of 1988 in the ‘Code des communes’) to the legislative domain, and from the stage of implicit obligation to the stage of explicit obligation, a law on libraries would satisfy this need” (Gautier-Gentès, 1999, p. 18).



In the end, other statements were adopted by librarians that possibly had less political force than a conscience clause and less administrative force than a law. As Tuleu (2005, pp. 30–31) writes: “In general, instead of demanding a law defining in a restrictive way the pluralism and the duties of libraries, librarians chose to react through their community, via associations, inciting all establishments to adopt statements setting the rules in the context of each local authority.” The Association des Bibliothécaires de France (ABF), following these events, issued a code of conduct that, among other things, reminded us of how its loyalty to regulatory authority was limited by the primary obligation of the universalism of libraries: “Librarians are careful not to give in to political, religious, ideological, union or social-pressure groups that would try to influence the acquisitions policies by forced imposition, ban or intimidation, directly or through their regulatory authorities” (ABF, 2003, n.p.)<sup>1</sup>. For more than a decade, librarians felt protected both by these statements, and by the evolution of a society that would not easily resort to censorship. As Belayche wrote in 2012:

Limiting access to immoral documents? No one (well, almost no one) is interested in this matter, since everything is so easily accessible on the Web! One cannot easily imagine today the political censorship that occurred during the years 1995–1996 on some titles in some municipal libraries. In the internet era, to censor a book? Even the most dictatorial states struggle to do it. (p. 69)

Two years later, events revealed to librarians how collections could still very much be pressured. In 2014, literature about gender and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-gender) parenting in youth collections came under attack by an obscure, extremist Catholic website—an attack followed by demands from local authorities to withdraw these documents.

In the case of Charlie, while some libraries refused to display the poster at their entrance, choosing instead to do so in a less prominent place, none reacted with an outrage as potent as that during the 1990s nor protested to the ABF ethics committee. There are two reasons for this. First, the pressure was not on acquisitions and therefore did not affect the central activity of libraries and the role of librarians in the same way that political pressure did during the 1990s or in 2014. As Lahary (2015) states:

Library staff often see their library as its own entity, and they consider their regulatory authority as a more or less legitimate authority that they prefer when it stays distant and uninvolved. We want to feel autonomous. This is our occupational quirk and, let’s face it, corporatism. On the political level, this stance is in line with the idea that power should be possessed by specialists: this is what we call technocracy. (pp. 64–65)

The second reason for the absence of reactions of librarians against this political pressure is because they did, in fact, support it; in other words, libraries did not try to resist because they deemed the message acceptable.

The defense of pluralism, as mentioned above, is mostly a fight against ourselves. The democratic vocation of libraries is achieved through a voluntary twisting of librarians' ideas. Therefore "when faced with books, old or not, about a religious subject, we impose on ourselves the need to maintain respect for neutrality and pluralism, that is to say some benevolence and tolerance that they, themselves, do not always contain" (Lamblin, 2010, p. 35). "Being a librarian also means allowing access to what we don't choose, to what we don't understand, to what we don't like," according to Lahary (2015, p. 60).

Internal workshops at the Médiathèque départementale du Nord, posters reminding the public of the deliberate pluralism of the collections and the proximity on the shelves of books of different religious persuasions at the Lingolsheim Public Library, training sessions on the neutrality of librarians at the Champs Libres library in Rennes: these actions taken by libraries in the third period of responses to the attacks indicate a return to a pluralist public debate and consequently recognition of the library's political role, which has been obfuscated for a long time by its social role.

*Charlie, Libraries, the Republic, and Public Service*

*From Laïcité to Indivisibility.* The events of January are indubitably centered around the question of religion in France, a country in which *laïcité* is an essential value for the indivisibility of the Republic. The first article of the French Constitution states that "France is an indivisible, secular, democratic and social republic." The actions implemented by libraries in the days following the attacks reflect an understanding of the importance of maintaining a conversation between individuals' religious identities and the nation's interest in freedom of speech. Consequently, the program at the Champs Libres library in 2015 was punctuated with meetings concerning organized religion and, so as to leave room for atheism, faith more generally; and in the academic library of Lyon 1, selections of books on the freedom of speech and on *laïcité* were displayed.

However, when many citizens claim that they "are not Charlie," doubts of the indivisibility of the Republic reappear when we observe the large number of *Je suis Charlie* posters in public cultural institutions, on their websites and Facebook pages, and so on. The fact is that this event "shows the disagreements and the tensions that come with living together: democracy is not a synonym with perpetual and general consensus" (Kupiec, 1999, p. 12). This brings libraries back to their political essence. The point is not solely to consider the public cultural institution as a tool of democracy, through its work of democratization, but to also consider the institution as directly political in the sense that it is the "reflection of the divergences and conflicts that stem from the social divide that takes place in democratic societies" (Kupiec, 1999, p.12).

However, as we have seen, the activities conducted by libraries after the attacks, because of the particularly controversial nature of *Charlie Hebdo* when it comes to religion, were at times not well-received. This negative reception manifested itself in broken windows, ripped posters, and empty meetings. The divergence that Kupiec mentions appeared at a time when librarians in fact felt that the public reception was going to be unanimous, especially when they considered how many people took part in the January 11th rally, which was publicized as a civic and republican event. The impact of these reactions, but also the friction between the principles of tolerant social coexistence and the freedom of speech, also allowed librarians to launch a second series of longer-term actions during 2015 that demonstrated a growing awareness of their desire to confront politics. Before this, librarians had consistently maintained a nonconfrontational approach; as Bertrand (2015) has put it,

an avoidance of politics rather than a strong interaction with it. Because libraries have an ambivalent position: on one hand they defend their civic role, and on the other hand they claim they have a role in maintaining social bonds. So first they accept political non-consensus via pluralism. And second, they cultivate living together, all the things that draws people closer, not the things that separate them. (p. 48)

The municipal library in Dunkirk, for example, put at the center of its program not the freedom of speech or *Je suis Charlie*, but the need to build a relationship with its users and the community. This was done, for example, by emphasizing the importance of the role of readers rather than librarians in the valorization of library materials, and by opening a library service point offsite, in a theater bar. The number of similar participatory projects that appeared in 2015 is remarkable, and many libraries (in Grenoble and Lyon for example) found in participatory initiatives—the reuniting of citizens around collective projects—a political response to the need to discover a shared meaning of identity.

*From the Continuity of Public Service to the Role of Librarians*

Furthermore, the *Je suis Charlie* message displayed in libraries, and also by the entire political establishment and local or national authorities, reminds us that the library is an institution that attempts to implement policies decided by politicians. While the principle of *continuity*, so fostered by Talleyrand,<sup>10</sup> allows libraries to provide the same services despite political changes, it also points to the fact that libraries are a service that must serve politicians first and politics second. Librarians would rather believe in the public's perception of independence, but as Merklen's 2013 book on library arson illustrates, this outlook is optimistic, and the awareness by librarians of the disparity among a feeling of autonomy by them, the representation of libraries by the public, and the political reality of the institution is becoming clearer.

The actions of libraries after Charlie, conducted throughout 2015 and not just in the first weeks after the events, entailed these reflections on the representation of libraries and offered a new, less institutional way of approaching the attacks. Workshops on the freedom of speech organized by librarians also revisited the question of censorship, and the *Démocratie* project of Lyon's municipal library, which initially was thought of as a reflection on democracy in general, after the attacks (and a few broken windows), became more about a reflection on participatory democracy, the masses, and empowerment. These actions demonstrate the active role that libraries can play in enabling citizens to reflect on political alternatives (Ksibi, 2013), presenting libraries as political institutions at work, as opposed to institutions that enforce public policies.

It is important then to distinguish between the *neutrality of libraries* and the *neutrality of librarians*. As Lionel Maurel has written (qtd. in Renaville, 2010):

The obligation of neutrality (which we should compare and distinguish from the obligation of reserve) applies to public agents as part of their duties. In this context, neutrality should be strictly observed and there should be no voicing of political opinions. But public agents are citizens too, and the obligation of neutrality does not apply with the same force when they express themselves when not on the job, as is the case when one writes a blog post. (n.p.)

The continuity of public service questions the boundary between a civil servant librarian and a citizen librarian, and the capacity of either to voice opinions. Lahary (2015), who is often critical of libraries that believe in their political autonomy, asserts however that

while it is not done often, it is important to distinguish the libraries from the librarians. . . . Librarians can voice an opinion in two ways. As public agents, they can defend values in their daily work and in the context of decision-making assistance. They can respect their ethics, and this attitude can last by default, for as long as they do not receive an explicit order telling otherwise. . . . The other possibility is to participate in a collective effort, in associations or collectives, or even to express themselves publicly personally, as long as it is not done as part of their duties as librarian. (p. 67)

The attacks of January 2015 revealed the role of librarians as political agents and the activist vocation of our occupation, which the process of professionalization that began in the 1980s unfortunately diluted (Merklen, 2013). The awakening of the librarians following the attacks, visible in the actions they implemented, the importance given to making them visible, and the internal training sessions and meetings within libraries, is certainly a prelude to a new generation of more engaged librarians who are more directly connected to the news and politics. Lahary (qtd. in Verry-Jolivet, 2005) suggested a generational typology of librarians:

The older ones are more engaged and creative. The 50-year-olds too, but they are more interested in a more republican approach of public reading, by an idea of culture sharing and a more normative approach of the job and its tools. The 40-year-olds are trained in management and have a different, more political vision of the job (the state against local authorities). Finally, the youngest stray from a centralizing approach to the role of books, and are better trained in new technologies; they adopt a more orienting than advising role, focusing more on the needs of the users, a more relativist cultural approach. (p. 69)

Ten years after this typology was written, we need to add a new category: a generation ready to participate in the construction of public policies, as well as projects proposed by associations and the public; a generation ready to engage in actions that are only neutral in the sense that they actually support the indivisibility of the French Republic in all its aspects, notably in its more contentious form, the debate of ideas and opinions.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude this paper, which has attempted to show that the question of the neutrality of libraries is not obvious and that the attacks in January 2015 largely led to a welcome and necessary reevaluation of librarians' daily practices, I will offer a few suggestions that might help the profession to better face a future in which politics has seemingly rushed back into library professionalism.

The first proposition would be to revive, unapologetically, a more political, perhaps even democratic culture among librarians. Bruno David talks about a "disappearance of the references to the founding cultural values, being replaced with a strictly technical discourse" (qtd. in Verry-Jolivet, 2005, p. 69). Kupiec (1999, p. 9) calls for a "problematical approach . . ., first to understand the meaning—and even the value—of the functions of librarians, then to use skills as means to an end in a perspective of teaching, culture and development of knowledge." To us, rediscovering the cultural and political roots of French librarianship seems to be an essential task for the coming years.

The second proposition would be to rediscover the meaning of what it is to have a "critical outlook." As Bertrand (2015) writes,

Our loathing for disagreement makes us avoid talking about what matters. [The French philosopher] Jacques Rancière, disillusioned (or lucid), sees in this "the end of politics," that is to say both "the end of promise and the end of division": the end of promise is the absence of a future, "a political process strictly in the present," and the end of division is the "free deployment of a consensual force, adequate to the free, apolitical deployment of production and circulation." (p. 50)

Anglo-Saxon countries have developed the idea of a "critical" library and information science, which French librarians could take as an example, using what others call "French theory" as support.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, we call for the readoption of the social engagement of librarians as a leading value in our profession. To this end we propose to rediscover the socially committed librarian heroes of the past, heralds of our acts of resistance, heralds of our participation in politics at work and democracy at work. It is then essential not only to get back in touch with the founding texts and the actions of French librarians like Eugène Morel and Julien Cain, but also to recognize the role of the librarian in the actions of the library. Let us praise not just the libraries, but the librarians who are committed to defending our values as professionals and active citizens.

### POSTSCRIPT

At the time of writing this paper, a new series of attacks hit France. On November 13, 2015, attacks were conducted simultaneously in several places in Paris, which resulted in the deaths of 130 persons, most of them at a rock concert at the Bataclan venue, having a drink on the terraces of bars and cafes, or dining in restaurants. Most of the victims were in their thirties, gunned down in places of leisure and culture. The violence of the attacks—and their randomness, as opposed to how journalists were specifically targeted in the case of *Charlie Hebdo* and Jews in the case of the Hyper Cacher store—plunged France into a new state of stupor and mourning. Fear was also a new ingredient in these attacks, which seemed to threaten anyone, anywhere, anytime.

This time, little action was undertaken by libraries, apart from the reactions of librarians on Twitter and a blog post by Dominique Lahary. Several reasons can be given in an attempt to explain or give meaning to this silence. The first is that it is more difficult to react when we cannot find words to describe precisely what it is that is targeted. In the January attack the freedoms of speech and religion were easily identifiable as targets and values to defend. The second potential reason is that the shock in November's was deeper, more intimate, and met less by action than by some kind of paralysis that we can only hope will be limited in its duration. The third potential reason is that librarians are citizens, lost between the worry of the attacks themselves and the worry of the political decisions taken by the government in response to them, such as the extension of the state of emergency and the termination of citizenship for convicted terrorists. During these troubled times, librarians are faced with a choice: to either hide behind this shock and these worrisome new political perspectives, or conversely to channel their awakening of January 2015 into a renewed engagement not for the current democracy, but for a democracy that remains to be built.

### NOTES

1. The main missions of the CSA are “the protection of minors, the respect of the pluralist expression of opinions, the organization of electoral campaigns on radio and television, the rigor of information processing, the allocation of frequencies to operators, the respect

- of the dignity of the human person, the protection of the consumers” (from the CSA’s website at <http://www.csa.fr/Le-CSA>).
2. Particularly because it heralds new security laws in France.
  3. A preliminary analysis of the actions conducted by libraries in the wake of the attacks was presented in an article published in the *Bulletin des Bibliothèques de France* (Bats, 2015). This article is more focused on giving a general overview of the results, rather than a finer, more thorough analysis.
  4. “Bib” for *Bibliothèques* (libraries), “enaction” for *en action* (in action), used as a hashtag to facilitate diffusion and preservation on Twitter.
  5. This list is sorted by action, not by establishment. Also, among the 150 listed actions, many have been conducted in the same library.
  6. There are three national libraries in France: the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BnF), the Bibliothèque Publique d’Information (BPI), and the Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire de Strasbourg (BNUS).
  7. That is to say, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Réunion, French Guiana, French Polynesia, and New Caledonia.
  8. INSA is an engineering school renowned in France and abroad. There are several INSAs in France, one of them in Lyon.
  9. To learn more about the continuity of public service in France, see <http://www.vie-publique.fr/decouverte-institutions/institutions/approfondissements/notion-service-public.html>.
  10. As Mathias Enard reminds us in his most recent book, *Boussole* (2015).
  11. French Theory is a body of theories in philosophy and more generally in the humanities developed during the 1960s in France, then in the 1970s in North America. Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Jacques Derrida are some of the leading figures in French Theory.

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